

## ANALYZING THE WOMEN CHARACTERS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S ROOTS AND SHADOWS AND THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR

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### ABSTRACT

*Women and girl children all around the globe face harassment and are dominated because of their gender weakness. Actually, there is no gender weakness, neither in men nor in women. These all have been created by the society and the customs, which we/ the society have been following over the centuries.*

*Women have to be treated at par with men in the society, but male domination and the male superior ego does not allow them to be a part in the society. When women get the same right and power that of men, it is believed that there will not be anyone to follow the order or act as the head in superior decision-making systems. No man will take orders from a woman, but women are trained and enslaved to fulfill the commands of male superiority.*

*A plant or a tree grows how well we treat it, just like the changes have to be made right from below. We all are trained in our home and it is where we mold ourselves to become who we are in the future or now. The patriarchal society and the chains they attach to the gender difference have to be destroyed.*

*Shashi Deshpande one of the prominent writers in India succeeded in delivering the real face of gender discrimination and the male domination over the female of the Indian society. The characters in her novel tear apart the patriarchal norms, which stood against them. The discussion in this paper is about the most iconic novel written by her 'The Dark Holds No Terror' (1980) and 'Roots and Shadows' written in 1983 and was published in 1996. The women characters Indu<sup>1</sup> (Roots and Shadows) and Saru or Saritha<sup>2</sup> (The Dark Holds No Terror) symbolizes the women in India or around the globe who are not well treated and who are locked up inside the four walls of followed traditions and customs. We come across the challenges they had to face in their life, as a daughter, wife and mother. Both the characters Indu and Saritha are in need of a life with freedom and love in which they want to be remembered till their last breath. The paper is titled as "Analyzing the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows and The Dark Holds No Terror". The objective of the study was to analyze the male domination over the female and the role of patriarchal society that pledged upon the universe to keep women a step back. The researcher points out the different sectors that enslave women and forbid them from being an active member in the society and its development. Using the feminist theory, the two novels are well analyzed and the women characters are widely discussed.*

**KEYWORDS:** Women Characters, Feminist Theory, Family & Domination

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<sup>1</sup> The protagonist of the novel Roots and shadows.

<sup>2</sup> The nickname and the protagonist of the novel and The Dark Holds No Terror.

## INTRODUCTION

What is theory? What does it mean to theorize? How is sociological theory different from common sense theory? What is specific about feminist theory? We have various kinds of ideas about theory. One idea being that theory is generalization, that what we do is we collect particular evidence of particular individual entities.

## WHAT IS FEMINISM?

Feminism is a concept, which always questioned the mainstream philosophical or political theory because in the early days there was hardly any mention of women as a different identity in any of the theories. Men and women are different and they are different biologically, but fundamentally if we look at them, there should be none, but this is not the **case**. If we look into the economic strength of women, we see that they possess only 1% of the land. 80% of the women in the world are working women. Their contribution cannot be negated because they are the one who produce 80–90% of food in the poor regions. If we look into the political strength they have gained throughout the years, only 25 women are elected as the heads of the state in various elections in 194 states.

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The status of women in Indian society has changed from time to time and it has been culture, religion and age specific. In view of many scholars, women were remembered and greatly honored in ancient India, enjoyed its freedom, good status and learning opportunities and that the decline in the women's status later resulted from foreign invasions. In ancient period of Indian history, the birth of a daughter did not frighten the parents, early marriage was not a norm and girls belonging to the rural families received administrative and military training and were entitled to the same education as boys and no limitations were put on their ambitions in this direction.

## FEMINISM IN INDIA

Feminism in India has also been divided into three phases. Moving from 1850–1915, was when the colonial venture brought the concept of equality and individual rights. Nationalism and introspection of discriminatory practices brought in social reform movement because we were not looking at the outside world. We were only looking inward at all these problems and discriminatory practices, which were prevalent in India but some of our social thinkers who had the opportunity to go abroad and study, could point out then how the women in India were at a disadvantageous position, and they come back to initiate the nationalist movement or the reformers movement, in which the women were asked to introspect their relegated position.

## THREE PHASES OF FEMINISM

When the feminism trend spread globally including India, it was a real challenge that the country had to face. With the development of feminism, numerous women-centric movements spread wide across India. There are three Waves of Feminism and in India, we could see Three Phases of Feminism and they are:

- The First Phase (1850–1915)
- The Second Phase (1915–1947)
- Political Parties – Women's Wing
- The Third Phase (1974 onwards)

### **First Phase**

The first phase, if we say, 1850–1915, was about men who tried to uproot the social evil against women, by eradicating Sati, widow remarriage, forbid child marriage, reducing illiteracy, or regulating the age of consent and providing property rights, which were all the initiatives taken by men. So, this is a unique feature of the Indian Feminist Movement.

### **Second Phase**

The second phase from 1915–1947 (till the time of independence) is very important, because this is a period when a little bit of emancipation of women had happened, in that some women were so educated, so daring and so liberated that they started participating in the independence struggle against the colonial rule.

Claiming model if Indian womanhood was a part of Victorian womanhood and this was a tool of cultural revivalism for many reformist of that period, Gandhi went to the extent of legitimizing women's activities and many of the women fraternity members participated in the civil disobedience movement. Gandhi also exhibited their feminine role of carrying self-obligation, sacrifice and tolerance, and this is why he always felt women were better leaders, arbitrators and also better diplomats.

### **Political Parties – Women's Wing**

All India Women Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), all these were emerging in the Indian scenario and they wanted equal participation and leadership roles in various political parties. Many of the political parties also had a women's wing, so that the women do not get intimidated by men. So, these women's wings would empower or would prepare them for assuming national roles and this would merge with The National Party positions.

### **Third Phase**

The Third phase which was from 1974 onwards. If we look at the third phase of Indian feminism, it was more about the beginning of feminist writings and more about environmental movements, which began. It was influenced by the new Wave of Feminism (Third Wave) in the world. A new generation of Indian feminists had emerged, which was unique, on the basis of which women progressed. It does not say one-size-fits-all.

Every situation required a unique solution and the women in the third phase managed to obtain the right to education, equal pay for equal work, maternity leave, protection from domestic violence, patriarchy, stereotype, etc.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Shashi Deshpande is a prominent Indian writer in English. She was born and brought up in Dharwad, Karnataka, India in the year 1938. She is the second daughter of writer–dramatist, R. V. Jagirdar (1904–1984) and his wife Sharda Arya. She did her schooling from a protestant mission school in Karnataka, where she read many novels in English language, which gave her a foundation in English and the literary world. She pursued her BA from Elphinstone College, University of Bombay. She also obtained a law degree. She went on to pursue post graduation and did her MA in English from the University of Mysore, Karnataka.

### **AS A WRITER**

In the year 1962, Shashi Deshpande married Dr. Deshpande who was a neuropathologist. She had two sons, and as a scholar, she soon had to return to books, though it might have been quiet difficult to coordinate both the family duties

and education. Yet, she successfully accrued a Diploma in Journalism in 1970 from Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan. Shashi Deshpande states that her life as a writer has been largely influenced and shaped by her father and her husband. Her father had instilled into her the habits of reading right from her school days. He also influenced her by his own rational and liberal way of thinking, but it was her husband who asked her to start writing her own experiences of life and then it was her father who had sent one of her write-ups for publication to Deccan Herald, a newspaper in South India.

The acceptance of this article marked the beginning of Shashi Deshpande's long journey as a writer. She then began to send her short stories and other articles to various magazines across India. Shashi Deshpande confesses that her literary career has been largely influenced and molded by three main factors; first, her father who was an accomplished writer, second, her schooling in English medium and third her gender. The third factor speaks much about Shashi Deshpande's involvement in women's social issues in most of her her novels.

## LITERARY PRIZES

Shashi Deshpande was conferred with Raugammal prize in 1984 and she was also honored with Nanjangud Tirumalamba Award in 1989 for a novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*, followed by Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for a novel *That Long Silence*. She has also received the proud award Padma Shri that was conferred upon her in 2009.

## Shashi Deshpande's Works

Shashi Deshpande's novel, *Shadow Play*, was shortlisted for the Hindi literary prize. It is also a matter of honor to Shashi Deshpande that her works have been published both in India and overseas, much of her works have been translated into various languages of the world including German and Russian. Her works have been seen as of academic importance and thus have been placed in the syllabus of various national and international universities. Shashi Deshpande has been on the board of Sahitya Akademi award for five years and has also acted as the chief person of the jury of Common Wealth Writer's Prize in the year 2000.

Shashi Deshpande wrote with the purpose and shared a deep sense of commitment and responsibility towards the society. This is reflected in the stand that she took on the murder of Professor Kalburgi, a writer and a chairperson in Sahitya Akademi Award Committee. She resigned from the General Council of Sahitya Akademi, as she was highly disappointed with the silence of the academy toward the murder of Kalburgi.

Shashi Deshpande's deep commitment towards society can be traced in her writings. Her novels are about women who explain their history, various roles, their place in the society and their interpersonal relations. Shashi Deshpande's novels about women and the issues related to them did bring up a platform for a debate whether or not she is a feminist.

## FIRST NOVEL

Shashi Deshpande's first novel – *The Dark Holds No Terror* – in this novel the protagonist, Saru, married against her parents will. She goes on to become a successful doctor, but her success as a doctor shakes away her marital life. The novel very carefully analyses the inner world of women like Saru who crave for equality of men and women in the society and also desire the freedom to pursue their own dreams. The novel also attempts to bring up the revolution against the complication and complexities of women like Saru.

## SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

In Shashi Deshpande's another novel *Roots and Shadows*, we could see women character, Indu, who is the female protagonist. Indu, who has always been taught and feared to obey the societal norms of society that relegates women to a submissive position, but this was not Indu's cup of tea, but she would never pretend to be defiant. When she knew actually that she was not defiant, but when she gets married to Jayant, she begins to fully comply with the demands of her husband, though at that point of time, she thinks that it is because of her love toward Jayant that she should show her dependence over him, but later she realizes that it was that she did not want any confrontation with him.

## SHASHI DESHPANDE AS A FEMINIST WRITER

Shashi Deshpande as a feminist writer exposes the Indian society and its culture. In Deshpande's novels, the characters are the true victims of patriarchal system or the rules, which are being designed and implemented upon women by the men. The Indian culture and its traditions prevent women from entering into social activities. As a writer, Deshpande breaks the barriers that are built up in the society.

### Analyzing the Women Characters in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots And Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terror*

In this write-up, we are going to compare both the women characters, Indu and Saru from Shashi Deshpande's novels. We analyse the struggles they had to overcome in their life to attain their real freedom; both the characters reflect the real life of Indian women, who are forced to obey the customs and traditions created by the patriarchal society. Every woman in India is in one or the other way a part of male domination over the female. They were taught only to remain stoic and forbear. The silence of women will never develop the society and its instincts. They wish to fly like the free birds, which they will.

Shashi Deshpande's '*Roots and Shadows*' and '*The Dark Holds No Terror*' explores the true situation which Indian women have to face in India. The women are chained and the patriarchal society plays an important role in creating it. One or the other way, the system we follow takes over our freedom. We believe we are free but what does freedom exactly mean?

The character Indu and Saru are the protagonists in the novel *Roots and Shadows* and '*The Dark Holds No Terror*' respectively. They both are the victims of the patriarchal society. Rules which they have been following right from their childhood made them to obey all others, but they both broke the chain loose themselves to taste the freedom.

## FAMILY AND DOMINATION

Both the characters, Saru and Indu, come from a very orthodox Hindu family. Right from their childhood, they were brought up with lots of dos and don'ts, both the characters, Indu and Saru, were brought up under strict parental rules. As girls, they were restricted from participating and engaging into many social activities.

In '*Roots and Shadows*', Akka and Jayant represent the patriarchal society. They dominate the whole system and call the shots. Restricting others actions is what they like the most and that made them more powerful among the others and Indu, the protagonist of the novel, '*Roots and Shadows*' strikes them with her actions. Akka, who is also a victim of the patriarchal society follows rules, which were forcefully imposed upon her. The parents of Saru from '*The Dark Hold No Terror*' also acts the same. They were coerced to follow these kinds of biased cultural beliefs and rules and they wanted others to follow them.

In the novel '*Roots and Shadows*', we could see Akka as a very fearful character, where others obey her. She dominates the whole family and the members in it. Saru says

"Akka, I thought she was just an interfering old woman, but she was more than that. She was a proof one of the strong. A family is like any other group, there are the strong and the weak; the strong have to dominate the weak and Akka thought I was one of the strong ones, that is why she put the burden on me." (RAS<sup>3</sup> 145)

Retrospectively, we could see her days of suffering when she was married off to the family. Her husband was unhappy living with her and he had an extramarital affair, which broke her heart. This experience in her life made her the woman she is now. She expressed her anger and she needs the power over others, which she had once suffered. The power to rule and to dominate over others is what she always wants. Indu states there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate." (RAS 69)

### CASTE AND MARRIAGE

Indu's marriage and Saru's marriage created big problems in the house. Both the characters got married to the man they loved, who are from different caste and religion. Indu married Jayant and Saru married Manu or Manohar. When Indu married Jayant, Akka could not accept it because Jayant is from other religion and he speaks other language. Akka says

"Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages...it's all right for a while, then they realise" (RAS 69)

Akka opposes it and this made Indu to move away from home to marry Jayant and live a life she dreamed. Saru marries Manohar and when Saru introduces Manu in her home, Saru's mother says

What caste is he?

I do not know. A Brahmin?

Of course, not.

Then, cruelly, his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so, they are low caste people, are they? TDHNT<sup>4</sup> (96)

The characters, Saru and Indu dreamed of a life where they could live a life with their loved ones. To live the life they both had to leave their parents behind.

### The Achievements and Dreams: Saritha and Indu

Saru and Indu dedicated their life to live with their loved ones and life was not that easy as they expected, both the characters are brilliant and they were good in studies. Saru became a doctor and Indu a well-known journalist. When we look into the life of Saru, we could see the struggle she had to go through to achieve her dream to become a doctor. Life was not easy. Saru and Manu always worked hard to straighten their life and survive their needs with money. When Saru was interviewed, the interviewer asked Manu:

"How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" TDHNT (35–36)

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<sup>3</sup> Roots and Shadows

<sup>4</sup> The Dark Holds no Terror

This put the seed of ego and complexity in Manu's mind. Saru suffered a lot in this and she was so unhappy with him. Another incident is when Saru and Manu meets Manu's colleague. Saru and Manu were shopping for their holiday trip on their vacations, and they accidentally meet Manu's colleague. Wife of Manu's colleague says

"If you had married a doctor", the wife said tartly,

"you would have gone to Ooty too... London, Paris, Rome, Geneva". TDHNT (111)

Both the incidents created ego and complexity in which Manu felt so bad and so small in front of everybody, just because his wife was a doctor and she earned a lot more than him. Indu's life with Jayant was also the same. Indu was never appreciated by her husband, and she felt lonely even when he is with her. Indu's desire to become a mother was discouraged by Manu. Manu said they do not have enough money to educate and bring up a baby. Indu was so unhappy and she just wants to move away from this gloomy atmosphere for a while.

### **Coming Back to Home: Saritha and Indu**

Both the characters, Indu and Saru, come back to their ancestral home when they were informed about a death in the family. Indu received a letter about Akka who is bedridden and who is about to die and Saru was informed by her professor that her mother is dead. Both the characters are in need of a change and they were looking for a space to free themselves from their miserable life. This death information was taken as a token for an excuse to get away from the life in which they had suffered a lot. Coming back to home brings a lot of memories and in both the novels, we are shifted into past and present, where the characters reveals us their childhood memories.

### **Marriage and Love: Saritha and Indu**

Indu and Saru looked up for love and care and they find Manu and Jayanth. Even when they are from other caste or religion, Indu and Saru believed them so much. They both dreamed of a life and believed that their parents will understand them better than anyone. Jayanthi and Manu treated them very badly and acted different. Indu and Saru were like mere pleasure objects to their husbands. Manu acted as a savage when he was with her in bed and both the characters, Indu and Saru, were not happy with their life. Saru says

"He is cruel to me...in bed." TDHNT (200)

When Saru was young, she was always blamed for her brother's death and Saru could not prove her innocence in front of her parents. Saru's brother died drowning and the responsibility for the cause of his death was put on her. Saru did try her best to save him and she loved her brother immensely. All her life, she was criticized and blamed Saru's mother says:

"You killed him. Why did not you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?" TDHNT (173)

### **The Root of Restrictions**

Akka and Saru's mother always followed rules; Indu and Saru were asked to follow them. When both the characters recall their childhood memories, we could see how they were brought up when Saru got out to play with her friends and brother. Saru's mother says

"Did not you think you could have helped me at home? There are vegetables to be cut and buttermilk to be churned. When you are working, I never ask for a bit of help. I slog the whole day all by myself, but to go for a walk.... a

huge anger filled me making me almost blind. What about me? It was my birthday. Did she remember that others had gifts and smiles and festive meals, while I?" TDHNT (170)

Indu when she was at college, she enjoyed a lot and made many friends. Once Akka shouted her for talking to a boy from library and Akka warned her about it. Talking to a boy from other caste was unacceptable to Akka because Indu was from an upper caste Brahmin family.

### **The Women of Silence: Padmini**

Padmini, the other character from *'The Dark Holds no Terror'* was humiliated and tortured by the rules of patriarchal society. Padmini is a victim of domination. Padmini was married off to a dark, uneducated, rich man who was 10 years older than her. Padmini was not allowed to make any decisions or opinions, instead she was asked to follow what family says. Akka Saru's mother, Indu, Saru and Padmini make no difference and they are all victims of patriarchal society.

### **Being Unfaithful: Indu**

When we focus upon the character, only Indu gets into an extramarital affair. Naren, a childhood friend of Indu gets into a relationship with her. Naren was a good boy in the family but after 10 years when Indu is back to her home Naren has changed a lot and now he is uncontrollable. Being with Naren made Indu happy and forget all the miseries she had in her life. When they get into physical relation, Indu finds her body responding. Indu says

"What then, had I achieved by giving him my body? Apart from wronging Jayant? Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, is dishonorable, dishonest, much more than this, what have I done with Naren?" (RAS 155)

When Indu felt guilty and she found herself cheating her husband, Indu decides to maintain a distance from Naren.

### **Acceptance of Life: Indu and Saritha**

In the conclusion of the novel, both the characters, Indu and Saru go back to the family in which they decide to adapt and understand the family and its importance. The character's life is a protest against the patriarchal society and its system of the male domination over the female. The life of characters reflect the life of Indian women or girls who are ignored and not allowed to actively participate in the society. The rules hold back the women from coming forward and they were enslaved inside the four walls of the kitchen. They are not someone to be held back, just like men, they do have skills and abilities that can contribute to the society. The customs and traditions never gave any value to women. There are female gods who are worshipped, but at the same time ordinary females or women are not respected. Women are tortured and the society makes them feel weak. This should change and the women should rise and fly like the Phoenix bird that rose from its ashes.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter explains briefly the characters Indu from *'Roots and Shadows'* and Saritha from *'The Dark Holds No Terror'*. Both the characters raised their voice against the patriarchal rules and systems followed in the Indian Hindu orthodox family. Their dreams and struggles to achieve their goals are well explained. Women in India are dominated by males and



patriarchal rules. The life of Saritha and Indu is similar to every woman in India. In one or the other way, women are chained to the nail of rules and restrictions.

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